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ABSTRACT

The 1978 Summer Reading Institute, which served 58 Washington, D.C., elementary school children, is described in this paper. Major characteristics of the program model are first identified, along with elements that were added to the model in the preplanning stage. Numerous aspects of the program are then described, including the make-up of the student body, staff, and teenaged tutorial staff; pre-program interviews and planning; organizational structure and daily schedule; field trips and special events; the formation of a media and resource room; principles on which the program was based; teaching approaches that emerged; the creation of an open, exciting school environment; planning and staff training activities; and the selection by each staff member of two or three children to whom they would give special attention. The Institute is summarized as a place in which intellectual discipline was introduced to children considered school failures, reading was noisy and exciting, resource rooms were designed for action, halls and playgrounds were turned into classrooms, and liking children was planned and not accidental. Activities in which children participated are then described, including sustained silent reading, learning to read song lyrics, writing about emotions, taking field trips, and receiving books of their own. (GW)

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MODEL READING INSTITUTE

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INTRODUCTION

The 1978 Summer Reading Institute (SRI), under the joint sponsorship of the Center for Unique Learners (Rockville, Md.) and the Associates for Renewal in Education (Washington, D.C.), followed a model established in 1977 by Dr. Nancy E. Dworkin, and reported on in The Reading Teacher, (Volume 31, No. 7, April, 1978, pp. 780-783). Before approaching an evaluation of the program, it would be helpful to identify the major characteristics of the model and some of the innovations resulting from last summer's experience.

1. Because of the intensity of the program, it is critical that all the primary agents in the child's life be involved from pre-planning through the delivery of services. This must include parents, tutors and program administrators as well as the children themselves. Every session must include objectives based on direct, formalized communication from parents and informal, semi-structured communication from the children. Each of the objectives must be time-bound and measurable in behavioral terms.

2. A second principle grows out of the theory that children will learn most efficiently when teaching systems are based on models of the children's own previously demonstrated learning skills. Thus, all diagnostic/planning procedures must be action-oriented to allow for the child's own positive ways of working. The administration and staff must be committed to the belief that every child is capable of complex learning under the appropriate circumstances.

3. Because of the short time period, the diagnostic and planning procedures must be administered quickly and in concert with each other. Three major types of diagnostic/planning instruments are used:

   a. a structured interview with parents emphasizing areas of interest and skill, to be used directly as part of the planning objectives;

   b. standardized diagnostic (reading) tests with an emphasis on subskill areas;

   c. the Reading Miscue Inventory (Goodman and Burke 1972), with its emphasis on a direct relationship between language process and planning.

4. It is hypothesized that even in cases of severe remedial need, children will function better in a group, with supplemental individualized instruction. The basic remedial unit consists of ten to fifteen children with a core of four to five instructors.

While each child's program is developed individually, the scheduling for individual tutorial and small group interactions depends on the particular mix of children and adults in the basic remedial unit.

5. Children benefit from contact with others with a wide range of ages and academic concerns. Thus, the model includes students ranging from elementary grades through high school although each of the basic remedial units encompasses an age range of two to three years.

6. Children benefit from being taught by their peers and young adults from similar school and environmental backgrounds. From junior high school on up, the students are viewed as teachers of the younger children with all of the privileges (including salary) and the responsibilities (including planning) relating to that status. As a result, the older children are required to develop lesson plans related to specific objectives and are (gently) held accountable for them.

7. The teaching experience for the older children is enhanced when they are paired with younger children who are reading at a level no more than one year below their own. Thus, the teaching experience also becomes a review of materials necessary to the student's own remedial progress, while it develops a sense of self-worth.

8. Parents should be viewed as professional participants in the program and should be given an opportunity for voluntary participation in every aspect of the work (with appropriate pre-training where necessary). Parents may not work with remedial units containing their children; sibling volunteers are not subject to this restriction.

9. All activities in the program should be related to either reading or language arts with the exception of recreation and sports. Each remedial unit develops its own internal programming as a function of the individualized plans drawn for each child in the unit.

10. All procedures, including final reports, should be based on an exploration of the children's skills with suggestions for future planning that relate to models of children's own best problem solving behaviors.

Six (6) new elements were added to the model in the pre-planning stage:

1. The program was viewed as a vehicle through which employment could be made to area teenagers over the summer months. The conditions for employment were reading level of eighth grade or above, and a desire to work with children. Additional criteria

were included as candidates were reviewed on the basis of hobbies and interests that would be useful to the Institute (such as sports, crafts, music, etc.).

2. Each licensed unit had a combination of professional teaching staff (licensed teachers), school specialists (special education, counseling, reading, music) and teenagers.

3. The administrative and programming structure were kept separate, with a reading and test specialist functioning as a program supervisor in charge of daily activities.

4. Each teaching unit staff met on a daily basis to review the children's individualized plans for the next school day.

5. An in-service teacher-training component was added to the program in order that the professional staff might transfer techniques and approaches to their own school environments during the regular school year.

6. All staff members (licensed teachers, specialists, and teenagers) were dealt with as part of the teaching staff and were included in planning and in-service training.

DESCRIPTION OF THE INSTITUTE

The SRI was held in Northwest Washington in Clark Elementary School, and serviced an official roster of 58 children, of whom 52 were on full scholarship. The children ranged from second through eighth grade, and were drawn from all of the D.C. school regions. As is to be expected, however, the largest group of children came from the Northwest because distances and travel made the "recruiting" of children from outlying areas rather difficult. The same trend was reflected in daily attendance, in which children who lived less than an hour's distance from the school had steadier attendance.

The children were identified by the various agencies funding the program. Although the administrative staff suggested age ranges and admission criteria, the decision of the agencies was honored. As a result, not only was the student body mixed as far as age and grade are concerned, but also in regard to reading disability. As a matter of fact, about ten percent of the children attended the Institute for enrichment purposes, and displayed achievement and performance scores at, or above, grade level.

The staff make-up was as varied as was the enrollment. Of the twelve members of the professional staff, nine were licensed teachers with teaching experience in the urban areas of D.C., Maryland, Virginia, and New York; three were reading specialists (two of whom are at the level of Reading Consultant/Supervisor), two were licensed in Special Education: Learning Disabilities; three had experience in various levels of private school, and one was a former school principal.

The tutorial staff consisted of fifteen teenagers (18-21 years old), funded through the Vocational Exploration Program of the National Alliance of Businessmen. An additional four were hired on the basis of their desire to work with young children and their own involvement in reading. Even the office and library staffs were composed of teenagers.

The basis for selection of staff, aside from professional competence or VEP screening, was a demonstrated gentleness with young children. It was felt that the children in the Institute would benefit from male and female, and black and white role models, whose unifying characteristic was not ethnic or cultural, but gentleness-of-spirit. In order to assure that the tutorial staff would be able to deliver reading service in the compact period of five weeks, the Center for Unique Learners undertook to train the NAB staff during the two weeks prior to the opening of the Institute. During the second week the professional staff participated as well.

The general outline of the week prior to the opening of the Institute involved interviews with parents and children, pre-testing, and individualized planning. Each child was scheduled to come in with a family member for an interview which emphasized the areas of the child's strengths and the objectives the family would like to see carried out in the course of the five weeks. These objectives were eventually included as part of each individual program, along with the findings of the more formal testing. Following the interview, the child went through a test procedure which included receptive and expressive language, specific reading skills, and reading rate and retention. During the early part of the Institute, each child was recorded on tape, reading a passage of 10-15 minutes duration, in order that language analysis might be carried out. The staff of each teaching unit then drew up an individualized plan for each child in the unit which included specific objectives for the five weeks, the time frame for each objective, and measurement criteria. In addition, the staff member responsible for each objective was identified.

Each teaching unit contained from 10-15 children and was staffed by a licensed teacher, a specialist, and three to four full-time tutorial staff members. In addition, each teaching unit could draw on the resources of the Program Supervisor (a Reading Specialist); the Director of the program (Reading Consultant, and Director of the Center for Unique Learners); and the Administrative Director (former school principal and Administrator

of the Center for Unique Learners). These three were not absentee landlords, but were present full-time. Since the teaching unit teams had been grouped so that special education, reading, music, and the arts were distributed, each unit could also call on the talents of the teaching and tutorial staff "across the hall." One of the nicest sounds of the day was the singing that came from class to class, usually led by one of the teaching staff (who was a professional folk-musician as well as a licensed teacher) assigned to a teaching unit.

The general structure of the day involved four sessions of varying lengths, which included individual teacher (by professional and tutorial staff); language development ranging from individualized instruction to small groups to the entire group; sustained silent reading, and outdoor activities. Accompanying all of the sessions were arts and crafts, window-box horticulture, etc. Each teaching unit developed its own time schedule, which was then coordinated through the administrative staff, and each unit was committed to sustained silent reading and delivering at least one session of individualized tutoring to each child each day. At some point in the day's activities, each child was read to, on a small group basis, from a continuous story. Usually, the groups "chose" their most dramatic reader who helped to sustain the excitement and the suspense of the reading from day to day.

Two special elements added a unique character to the Institute program. First, Friday was set aside for trips or special events in the school. Once again, each teaching unit decided its own Friday program, with the one promise that the choice be tied into the general reading and language development character of the program. Each unit would submit a separate set of objectives for the trip, and relate them to the program written for each child. The events of the day ranged from a trip to the Air and Space Museum to a spaghetti feast in the classroom. Many of the trips served as the underpinning for Modified Language Experience exercises, and several children referred to them in their end-of-summer evaluations.

Second, one of the large classrooms was designated as a Media and Resource Room, with reading materials, games, and books available to all children and staff of the Institute. The materials were all laid out on tables (shelves were taboo) so that they would be within eye-sight and hand-reach of even the smallest child. Unlike many libraries, it was the busiest, noisiest room in the Institute, and that was the intent. It was a "hands-on library" and the best part of it was that most of the material was usually in circulation. A halo effect was the impact it had on teacher negotiation. "If you don't take out all of the Action series, I'll admit that I have all of the Olympic histories in my room."

During the pre-Institute training period, there were three principles which received major emphasis. First, a five-week program has little time for a thorough exploration of clinical symptoms. Our job is to identify the strengths that children already have in learning, and apply them to areas

of concern. Second, no single teaching model or technique is universally applicable for a group of children who have a long-standing history of learning failure. Third, emphasis on children's success is an obligation for every staff member. Even when a child has only achieved partial success, the focus must be on the part of the problem which is right for use as a model in completing the rest of the problem. This third principle was the glue that held the entire program together, and much of the training of the staff dealt with ways of identifying appropriate behaviors.

There were, however, three major teaching approaches which emerged during the course of the summer. The first was the use of highly structured, sequential, phonically-oriented programs for word attack and spelling with an emphasis on the Weiss method. Four of the teachers in the Institute were selected partially on the basis of their knowledge of and commitment to the Weiss approach. Second was a general Language Experience Approach, which was frequently used even with children who were also being taught through the Weiss Method. Many of the objectives for the Friday trips, watching the seeds you planted grow, and other physical activities fed directly into a modified LEA. Third, and especially for the upper graders, there was an emphasis on the development of study skills through the use of problem-solving techniques.

The division of the teaching units represented a major problem due to the disparity in reading deficit from child to child. While there were middle graders reading at or above grade level, there were also seventh and eighth graders reading at first and second grade levels. Ultimately, it was decided to group the teaching units along general grade lines (1-3, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8). The reason for the decision lay in the heavy individual character of the program. Although many of the children were considerably below grade in reading, they were on, or above par in other academic and in social areas. Therefore, children of near-chronological age could interact with their entire group in many of the areas of language development, sports activities discussion, trips, etc., while receiving individual attention at their reading grade level. In effect, a new piece was added to the model where group activities were geared to chronological age ranges, and individual activities were geared to specific reading needs.

Perhaps the most important environmental variable dealt with the nature of the school's formal and administrative structure. On the whole, it was felt that while the children required structured programs, it was also necessary for them to experience a school environment which was open, demanded excitement rather than silence, involvement rather than obedience, and did not separate learning from pleasure. We did not want the children's favorite period to be recess! Two anecdotes may best illustrate the feeling tone in the halls and rooms of the school.

When the resource room was first opened, children poured into it like water running down a dry gulch. Sure it was noisy! But the noise was the noise of surprised children exchanging information about all the things they could read and do over the course of the summer. But we needed a staff member who could organize and run the logistics of supply and demand. We were lucky enough to be adopted by a grandmother volunteer who had herself been a teacher and school librarian. So she organized the room and all the books stood on end, and all the games were neatly stacked and pencils, papers, and crayons were put away each night and the children stopped coming. And she and we scattered the books on the tables again, took out the games, and got less compulsive about the pencils. And the children and teachers came back to stake their claims and a lot of reading got done and ultimately the discipline was that of learning rather than of regulations.

One of the tutorial staff was both loud and exciting to the children. One day she marched down the hall like the Pied-Piper, accumulating youngsters as she went, and neither she nor they were quiet. You might even say that they were noisy! And lots of teachers' heads popped out of lots of rooms, and there was a lot of shushing going on. And all of a sudden the heads realized the noise was the excited talk of a story that had just been read and the things that were going to be done for the rest of the day, and how terrific it is to be in school, and how - "Gosh, there are only ten days left." And the shushing began to change to participation and the classroom began to extend into the halls and the playground, and eventually into the streets of the city. Teachers and children forgot where learning ended and pleasure began.

The last component of the program was planning and staff-training which were viewed as a single objective. Each teaching unit met three times a week to review the objectives for each child, and to exchange information about the strategies that each child used most effectively. The power of these meetings was most visible in the materials designed by the staff to fit the specific objectives of the children. Some of the teachers came in a half-hour early to put the finishing touches on individual lesson plans and more often than not, entire teams stayed well beyond the end of a school day in order to find a way of reaching specific children. Built into the planning was a mandate that each staff member select two or three children who would receive extra personal attention, and that every child have a "special friend" - an advocate. Does this mean that they "played favorites?" It sure does! We wanted to be positive that no child fell between the cracks. If "playing favorites" meant that every child in the school, including the most difficult, the least likable, would have an adult friend and confidante - then we were all for it. If "playing favorites" meant that fast children, noisy children, and even hostile children would know that they were liked and respected, then we were all for it. If "playing favorites" meant that every child knew that despite any negative behaviors, somebody was willing to teach him/her, we were all for it. If

"playing favorites" meant that quiet, shy, and withdrawn children would not be overlooked, then we were all for it! If "playing favorites" meant that each one of the children was somebody's favorite, then we were all for it! It wasn't always easy since some of the children were more difficult to like than some of the others, but liking children should not be optional in the schools, and it wasn't. The amazing thing was that staff members didn't always agree with each other. "What do you mean_____ is difficult? I think he's terrific. He just needs a lot of attention." Once the egos of the staff members were enlisted on the side of the children, they made it their business to convince the rest of the staff not only to like two or three children, but to embrace the entire school, because when everybody is somebody's favorite, it is possible to avoid having only somebodies who are everybody's favorite.

But how about in-service training? After all, planning and making materials and befriending children, no matter how valuable, can't replace knowledge and technique and training. No, they can't - they can only parallel training, which should be on-going and integral to a program structure, and not superimposed. So throughout the summer, two sessions of in-service training were set aside every week and the entire staff participated. The sessions lasted from one to two and a half hours, and the entire professional staff stayed on a voluntary basis.

In effect, the week of training prior to the SRI, plus approximately twenty hours during the Institute, constituted a graduate course. Aside from the give and take that must go on between administration and staff, the sessions were devoted to exploring specific techniques for reading remediation, bringing the staff up to date on issues in the field of reading and identifying some of the major problems besetting the children in the Institute. These sessions were conducted by the Director, Administrator, and Program Supervisor, all of whom had both practical experience and theoretical knowledge in the fields of reading and general learning theory. Problem-solving techniques and exploration of the language strategies used by children with reading deficits, represented areas of information for most of the staff, and a good time was had by all!

How do you summarize a Summer Institute which introduces intellectual discipline to the very children who are considered school failures; believes that reading can be noisy and exciting; thinks that resource rooms are for action, not neatness; turns halls and playgrounds into classrooms; and thinks that liking children should be planned and not accidental? That's how you summarize it!

ACTIVITIES

There were some activities that carried the stamp of the program's uniqueness, although we by no means suggest that any of them were "invented" in the summer of 1978.

1. Sustained Silent Reading - WOW!

   Children would come racing in from a hot basketball game, hit the classroom, grab something to read, and silence fell. Everybody read and they read all over the place. The teachers stretched out next to kids, and everybody had books propped up on their stomachs, magazines enjoyed a five-week vogue; textbooks were valued because they were hard-covered and therefore "grown-up"; the children ransacked their homes to find books to bring to school. Many of the parents said that their children had never read as much. As status symbols go, silent reading was pretty terrific.

2. Singing

   You can't sing if you don't know the words and one of the ways to learn them is to read them from song-sheets and wall-charts and song books, and album covers, KISS comics and the Rolling Stones.

3. Emotions

   Even tough kids have them! Learning to express them in writing and share others' emotions through reading is one way of unlocking the protective prisons in which many of the children hid before the Summer Institute. One of the school's best athletes wrote an essay about a butterfly which had all the delicacy of that insect. He was glad to have the work shared as long as he didn't have to say it out loud. The playground is a place to be physically tough, but the classroom sanctioned the legitimacy of sensitive feelings.

4. Trips

   The role of trips and the special events planned for each Friday can't be overlooked. A change took place from the first to the last week of the Institute in the way that children viewed them. In the beginning they represented a break from routine, and a way to leave the school for a few hours. By the midpoint of the program, they had become an integral part of the school scene and were no longer viewed as an escape but as another way of enjoying the school environment.

5. Books

The children were constantly surrounded by the printed word. What was exciting for them was that they always had access to materials and supplies and books. Nobody stopped them from "messing up" the room, so they kept it in good order. The point was that it was their room. Books were made available "for keeps" and many libraries were started through the impetus of the program. Most of the books were acquired through Reading is Fundamental (RIF), and the philosophy of giving children books of their own was woven into the program of the Institute. The one condition for taking a book home was that the children had to demonstrate that they could read them before they kept them.

6. Informality

One of the most difficult concepts of the program was the separation between structure and informality. It was clear from interviews, testing, and the children's own preferred behaviors that structure was necessary in most of the individualized programs and objectives. On the other hand, many of the children were hostile to a school environment, and most especially to the rigidity which characterized school for them. The philosophy of the program led to flexible small group structures whose makeup changed depending on the children's individual objectives. Much of the staff training concentrated on the maintenance of disciplined objectives while, at the same time, allowing the children a good deal of freedom of movement, open-access to the resource room, a chance to interact through sports and other activities as part of, and not as a relief from, the Institute program.

For many of the teachers who were used to dealing with a whole class and who viewed discipline as a behavioral rather than an intellectual issue, there was a necessary period of re-adjustment. By the end of the summer, the staff had become alert to the difference between excited noises which flowed from the children's involvement in learning and discovery, and the occasionally disruptive sounds which constituted an imposition on the rights of others. There were a lot of happy sounds in the school, and very little shushing.